Shinangana had been trained, would he have been a genius in that kind of mathematics where the power of reasoning is needed? It is impossible to say, but it may be noticed that all his achievements were, after all, but masterpieces of memory, and that reasoning had very little to do with them.

The conclusion of our observations is then as follows : in the Bantu mind the literary sense is infinitely more developed than the mathematical. This is probably the case in all uncivilised or half civilised races, but amongst the South Africans it is strikingly apparent.

F. THE LITERARY SENSE OF THE THONGAS.

Let us look more closely into this literary faculty which the Thonga grammar has already revealed to us. It not only consists in the possession of a well constructed language, denoting powers of classification, combination, co-ordination and graphic description, but also shows itself in the poetic expression of their feelings, in a remarkable power of comparison, and in a rich folklore.

The *facility of expression*, amongst the Thongas, is very great. Any one, man or woman, is at any time ready to speak, and speaks correctly with the greatest ease. In this respect, the race is perhaps more advanced than many civilised peoples. There is nothing like the timidity you so often meet with amongst the peasants or workmen of our own lands, who, though they have had a full course of primary education, would be totally unable to deliver an address. A Native can always stand up and say what he thinks on any given question. Even if he has not thought much about it, he can speak! Finding words is no difficulty to him. Knowledge will perhaps be lacking, but fluency of speech never! This ease of elocution has evidently been acquired through a long experience in the discussion of public affairs on the *lubo*, where, as we saw (I, p. 436), every one has the right of expressing his opinion. This habit has developed literary ability,

and the Bantus, as a whole, deserve the compliment once paid to the pupils of the Lovedale Institute by the Rev. J. Henderson, when he said to them: "Your race has certainly received the gift of eloquence!" (1) 521 537

As regards the subject matter of their speeches, it does not always show much reflection, or many new ideas. Nor is there much order or sequence in their discourses. This would require proportion, measure, forethought, and all these virtues belong rather to the arithmetical sense which is so sadly deficient in the Bantu mind. What makes a Bantu address especially interesting is rather the *power of comparison* exhibited by Bantu speakers. They excel in discovering spiritual truths in material facts, or rather in perceiving the relations between the spiritual and the external world. This is one of the characteristics of the poetical faculty, and these so-called savages certainly have some sense of poetry in their minds. Most of the antithetic riddles, which will be quoted shortly, are instances of this power of comparison. When developed by proper training, this faculty will certainly become productive of valuable work. 195 537

So far, the training of Natives has been mostly in religious subjects, and I beg to give my readers some examples of their mode of comparison which I noted while listening to the preaching of evangelists, examples which bear the strong impress of the Bantu character. Sometimes the imagination is so subtle that the result is almost incoherent. They are satisfied even if the point which the two things compared have in common, that which grammarians call the "tertium comparationis," is almost infinitesimal.

(1) This power of elocution is very useful in Mission work, when evangelising the heathen villages all over Thongaland, the converts being always willing to make a speech or deliver an exhortation. They generally do this with great animation, and although the thinking is often poor, and does not show much sequence, they at least are never at a loss for words. I only once witnessed such a sad occurence! One of my pupils had prepared a sermon and was delivering it, when suddenly he stopped and could not proceed. He had lost the thread. Then a good natured smile appeared on his features and all his companions laughed heartily. This was the first time they had seen one of their countrymen in this predicament! The student had prepared a plan for his address, and had forgotten it! In former times plans were entirely absent and consequently there were no threads to lose!

For instance a Tembe Christian exhorting his hearers to fight against evil, says : 195 537

Let us, in this fight, take the shield which has been made from the skin of this ox slaughtered for our sake, Jesus Christ.

A moment of reflection is required to find the logical sequence which unites all these images. The Bantu shield being made of ox-hide, the scriptural image of the slaughtered lamb had to be transformed into that of an ox, for the sake of comparison!

Another evangelist, whose discourses were specially interesting because he was a master in this art, one day spoke for more than half an hour on the text "Charity which is the bond of perfection." In Thonga, bond, string, or rope is expressed by the same word (ngoti). So he showed how a string could be compared to charity by a great number of images, of which I remember at least the two following :

This rope, charity, is the rope which fastens the donkey to the trunk of a tree. In the evening you tie up the donkey ; it can graze the whole night all round the tree without any fear of being lost. So when we remain in connection with our Saviour, who is the tree, then we are happy and protected against all danger.

He evidently remembered the words of Christ : I am the vine. And he added :

Charity is the string, the string which ties up a parcel. You have many precious things in your parcel... But if you possess no string to tie up all these things, they will be lost on the way, one after the other, and you will reach the end of your journey (or of your life) having kept none of your spiritual advantages, etc.

This is how Simeon Gana tried to explain what conscience is :

Conscience resembles two companions who have made an arrangement to plunder, with impunity, another man's field of sweet potatoes. One of them climbs a tree, the other takes the hoe and digs up the potatoes. As soon as the owner of the field appears, the one on the tree whistles and the other promptly runs away, so that he is never

caught. But one day, the climber ran a thorn into his foot and he was obliged to sit down and extract it, as he could not climb to his post of observation in that condition. In the meantime his companion was stealing the potatoes in perfect tranquillity, thinking that his comrade was on guard. The owner arrived on the scene and caught him. Now you see clearly that conscience is the man who climbed up the tree. As long as he was doing his duty, success attended their plan. As soon as he fails to work, the man falls into disgrace. So let our conscience always be awake and warning us !

We Europeans would never have dreamt of such a simile. Conscience represented by a thief helping another to steal! But the Bantu audience was perfectly satisfied...

Here is another comparison bearing on a similar subject :

The words of God are powerful and stir up the heart. They are like intestinal worms (manyokwana) which for a long time remain quiet in the body. But one fine night they awake and man cries out from pain, saying : "I am ill !" For years the man mocked the word of God, but that day he felt its power !

Hundreds of such comparisons, not always denoting a very refined taste, but always picturesque, might be collected from the addresses of Native Christians. I will only add this, which is deeper and more significant than many others, and which occurred to the imagination of one of my pupils :

We, preachers of the Gospel, are messengers of mourning. We have been sent to inform people of the great mourning of Jesus Christ by which He saved the world. Let us not resemble that messenger who had to go to another country to deliver his errand. On the way he passed a village where people were drinking beer. He heard the songs, looked on at the dance, entered and did not deliver his message. Such would we be, if distracted by worldly amusements, we were to neglect our sacred duty of preaching the cross.

Besides this undeniable power of comparison, Native addresses often reveal another curious feature ; the Native tendency to present ideas in a round-about manner. This is called *ku pamba*. Beneath expressions apparently simple they hide other meanings in a manner so ingenious and subtle that some of their hearers

often fail to understand them. This literary device is often apparent in their riddles, or proverbs. 195 537

The literary gifts of the Natives, finally, manifest themselves in the very interesting and rich folklore which will form the subject of our second chapter.

*
* *

Is it possible after this rapid study of the Thonga language to fix with greater accuracy the place which the Bantu languages occupy in the historic development of human speech? Languages which are regarded as the most primitive are characterised by a linguistic phenomenon which is called holophrase, viz. a single word means not only a single action, but an action accomplished under a number of peculiar circumstances. Mr. Marett in his excellent little book entitled *Anthropology* (p. 140) quotes some very curious examples of holophrase borrowed from the American languages, especially from the Fuegian. A single expression is said to mean : "to look at each other hoping that either will offer to do something which both parties are unwilling to do." I have found in Thonga only one instance in which traces of the holophrase system might be found, and this is by no means so wonderful. The demonstrative adjectives are met with in three forms, which indicate not only the object referred to, but its place as regards distance and in relation to the person speaking. Tihomu *leti*, means these oxen, near at hand, near me ; tihomu *leto*, these oxen, somewhat further off, near you, my interlocutor ; tihomu *letiya*, those oxen, far away and near a third person. The more the final a is prolonged, the further off are the oxen. Moreover these demonstrative adjectives indicate not only the situation of the oxen in space but also in time ; *leti* are the oxen of to-day, *leto* those of a near past and *letiya* those of which we were speaking a long time ago. But this is an isolated case. In Thonga ideas are differenciated almost as completely as in our Indo-European languages. The language has evolved from the holophrastic to the analytic. My conclusion is therefore that the Bantu languages, though they belong to the agglutinate variety, have reached a high degree of development ; they reveal the existence of intellectual powers not essentially different from those of civilized races. They certainly constitute the greatest achievement of Bantu mental activity and the most precious treasure inherited by the Bantus of to-day from their forefathers. 192